

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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CONFLICTS BETWEEN ENDANGERED SPECIES AND FEDERAL PROJECTS HAVE BEEN OVER-EMPHASIZED, SECRETARY ANDRUS SAYS

Estes Park, Colorado--Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said today that conflicts between endangered species and federal projects have been over-emphasized and most problems have been resolved through negotiations between agencies.

The Secretary told the National Audubon Society that in three years since passage of the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service has had 124 documented consultations and another estimated 4,500 informal consultations with other federal agencies to iron out problems. He said these efforts have resolved the problems at the regional level in all but three cases.

"Most conflicts between endangered species and federal projects can be resolved and have been," the Secretary said.

"Under that Act, my role as Secretary of the Interior is to assure the protection and enhancement of endangered species, and I intend to fulfill that responsibility," Andrus said.

"If an irresolvable conflict arises -- and judging by the record so far there are few -- then and only then Congress should evaluate all aspects of the project -- its economic and social impacts, its environmental effects over and above any effects on endangered species, who will benefit, and so forth. After this evaluation the Congress could decide whether that project is more important than the loss of the species forever."

Andrus pointed out that the President in his Environmental Message had ordered identification of all critical habitat under federal jurisdiction or control, and this would help avoid conflicts such as the current situation involving the endangered snail darter and Tellico Dam in Tennessee.

The Secretary outlined for the Audubon Society some of the many assignments given to the Department of the Interior in President Carter's Environmental Message last month. The Secretary said the President's message "amounts to a major reassessment of the nation's environmental policy -- to strengthen it, to improve the quality of life, to preserve the best of America for ourselves and for the future."

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